

Dates to Remember for the 2008-2009 School Year

Summer School
06/29/08 – 08/05/08

First Day of School
08/25/2008

Parent-Teacher
Conference Days
10/03/2008
12/08/2008
02/27/2009
05/15/2009

Issuance of Report Cards
11/07/2008
01/30/2009
04/09/2009
06/22/2009

Holidays/Vacation Days
09/01/2008
10/13/2008
11/11/2008
11/27-28/2008
12/22/2008-01/02/2009
01/19-20/2009
02/16/2009
03/23-27/2009
04/10-13/2009
04/16/2009
05/25/2009

Last Day of School
06/15/2008

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D.C. Government Child & Family Services Agency



Help Your Child Succeed At School

Getting involved is one of the most significant ways you can help your child stay in school and get better grades. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background. By being involved with your child's education you will improve their achievement, reduce absenteeism, improve behavior, and restore your child's confidence in their ability to learn. So show your child and his/her teachers, that their school life is important by making it a significant part of your life as well.



Reading aloud to children is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Talking to children about the books and stories read to them also supports reading achievement.

Involvement in your child's education can mean:

- Reading to your child
- Providing a quiet place for homework
- Checking homework every night and supervising assignments
- Limiting TV viewing and internet access on school nights
- Discussing your child's progress with teachers
- Volunteering at school and in your child's classroom
- Promoting school attendance

Building and Maintaining Relationships with the School

Develop a partnership with the school and share relevant information about your child's education and development. This will ensure that the school has the information needed to provide the right kind of education services for your child. **It is critically important that you understand the school's procedures and requirements for enrollment, discipline, performance and graduation.** Because terms can be confusing, do not hesitate to ask for an explanation if there are any aspects of the program and/or process that you do not understand. Remain positive about all relationships by treating all school staff as allies. Assume that they can be effective, collaborative partners in meeting the youth's educational needs. When problems arise, always ask for and listen carefully to the school's perspective on the issue. Avoid getting sidetracked by personal conflicts by maintaining focus on the youth and/or problem, not the people. Always discuss issues and make offers or proposals to come up with "win-win" solutions that may be satisfactory to the child and the school.

Working with Teachers



***“Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.”***

- Henry Ford

It is important that you are keeping an ongoing record of the work that your child is doing. Do not throw anything away; this includes homework, tests, progress reports, and report cards. It is equally important to keep a log of all contacts with school staff (meetings, phone calls, notes sent and received, etc.) and any developments concerning a child's educational experience.

At the beginning of each year or as soon as you can, it is important that you contact your child's teacher(s). The best way that you can do this is by attending the school's open house or by scheduling an appointment. During this time you can get acquainted with the teacher and learn what their expectations are. This demonstrates to the teacher that you are interested in the education of your child. Inform the teacher(s) of what they need to know about your child and the challenges facing youth in foster care. If she/he has significant learning and/or behavior problems, make these known from the beginning only if you believe that the information that you share with the teacher will be used to accommodate the child's needs. It's best to only tell them if you can suggest a strategy to help the child perform at his best. For example: "he is easily distracted, so you may want to seat him in front of the class." Check in with teachers regularly and follow up on reported problems. Attending parent-teacher conferences and other meetings regarding your child will keep you informed on their academic progress. If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately. This allows you to address a problem before it grows into something bigger. Other indicators of how well your child is doing in school are: homework, progress reports, report cards, and assessments. Remember to talk to your child to determine they feel about school.

Maintaining Information

Put all requests in writing, and confirm telephone requests or oral requests made at meetings with a letter. Always keep a copy of letters you send to the school. One useful strategy is to hand deliver a letter to the school, and ask school personnel to sign and date your copy, acknowledging receipt. To keep information organized, keep everything in files or in a 3-ring binder with

material labeled by topic and in chronological order. Any copies of report cards, incident reports, etc. should go to the social worker as well to be included in the child's file. Likewise, it is important that you purchase school pictures so that your child will have pictures in the future. Social workers should also receive a copy of any pictures so that they can be place in the child's file.

“In the complex world, it takes more than a good school to educate children. And it takes more than a good home. It takes these two major educational institutions working together.”

~ Dorothy Rich

A child can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer.



Some children experience difficulties in school that may range from learning to behavior problems. These difficulties may be due to one or more physical, mental, and/or learning disorders/disabilities. Children with special needs are usually entitled to receive special services and/or accommodations through the public schools. Federal law mandates that

every child will receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. These mandates also entitle children with special needs to receive extra services to support their ability to learn in school. Three Federal laws that apply to children with special needs are:

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).**

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**
 - **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990).**
- The educational services that most children receive through public schools are mandated under IDEA and Section 504.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IDEA revolutionized the way students with disabilities are educated in the United States by ensuring educational equality and eliminating the mis-education and exclusion of students with disabilities. IDEA requires school districts to integrate students with disabilities into regular education settings.

In order to decide if a child qualifies for services under IDEA, a full initial evaluation of the child is conducted by qualified professionals. If children qualify, they are entitled to special education and related services at no cost to their parents. Under IDEA, "special education" means a specially designed instruction program that meets the unique needs of a child with a disability. Each qualified child is entitled to a



In order for any child to receive special educational services they must go through this process.

full description of those services in an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The child must have access to the same general curriculum so that the child can meet the same educational standards that apply to all children in the school district. An IEP is the document that sets out what the school is going to do to meet the child's individual educational needs. School districts are required to follow specific procedures to determine a child's eligibility for special education, to develop the child's IEP, and to resolve conflicts. Parents of children with disabilities must be afforded a meaningful opportunity to participate in the development of their child's IEP.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

~ Nelson Mandela

Section 504 Under IDEA

Section 504 ensures that children with disabilities have equal access to an education. All public schools and many independent schools receive federal funds and are required to follow Section 504 guidelines. **To qualify for services under Section 504, a child must have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or must be regarded as having a disability.** Major life activities include: self-care, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. As defined under Section 504, disability is a physical or mental impairment that includes, but is not limited to: "learning impairments;

disabilities; learning disabilities; attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity; severe allergies, chronic asthma, or health impairment; cosmetic disfigurement or amputation; injuries or broken bones; communicable diseases; drug addiction (unless individuals are current users, not in rehabilitation programs); and alcohol addiction (does not exclude current users)". Students that qualify for services and accommodations must have equal access to all academic and non-academic activities and programs. In addition, schools are required to provide related services and accommodations to qualified students with disabilities, regardless of eligibility for special education.

However, schools are not required to provide an individualized educational program (IEP) that is designed to meet the child's unique needs and provides the child with educational benefit.

How does the Section 504 process work in schools?

Check with your school to find out what to do. Talk to the principal, guidance counselor, special educator, or teacher to learn how the process works and how to make a referral for Section 504 services. The 504 team will gather information to determine your child's eligibility. The team will develop a plan with you to accommodate your child's educational needs. Every three years the plan will be re-evaluated.



IDEA and Parents Rights

Parents have the right to:

- Request an evaluation if you think your child needs special education or related services
- Request a reevaluation if you think your child's present educational placement is no longer appropriate.
- Obtain an independent evaluation if you disagree with the school's evaluation.
- Review all of your child's school records.
- If you feel that some information in your child's records is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or other rights of your child, you may request that the information be changed. If the school refuses your request, you have the right to request a hearing in order to challenge the questionable information in your child's records or you may file a complaint with your state

Section 504 and Parents Rights

Parents have the right to:

- Examine all relevant records regarding their child
- Notice (but not necessarily written notice) regarding identification, evaluation, placement of their child
- Notice of their parental rights
- File a local complaint regarding the school's decision about their child's evaluation, eligibility, or placement
- Request mediation or an impartial due process
- Be represented by an attorney in a hearing
- Having attorney's fees paid if they prevail at a hearing
- A review of the hearing decision at a higher level
- File a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, or your local Human Rights Commission.

Tips

Important things you can do include:

- As a parent, you can initiate changes in your child's education program. Monitor your child's progress and periodically ask for reports. If your child is not progressing, discuss it with the teacher and determine whether the program should be modified.
- Try to resolve directly with the school any problems that may occur with your child's assessment, placement, or educational program.
- Keep records. There may be questions about your child that you will want to discuss, as well as meeting and phone conversations you will want to remember.
- Join a partner organization. Besides sharing knowledge, experience, and support, a parent group often can be an effective force on behalf of your child.

Educational Advocate and Surrogate Parent

Educational Advocates

An advocate is a person who speaks or writes in support of, on behalf of, or in defense of another person or cause. An Educational advocate does this for parents with children with special educational needs. Advocates are representatives who inform parents of their educational rights and assist families in negotiating and resolving disputes with the school district. They evaluate the child or youth who has the disability and makes recommendations about the services, supports, educational placement, and program. Advocates gather information and facts about the child's disability and educational history and act on behalf of the child to ensure that the child's educational

needs are met. Educational advocates are attorneys, who are knowledgeable about the legal rights that children and youth with disabilities are entitled to and the procedures that parents must follow to protect the child's and/or youth's rights.

Educational Surrogate Parent

Many rights under IDEA can only be asserted by the child's or youth's parent. However, due to the unique circumstances that are associated with children and youth in care, IDEA grants authority to an "educational surrogate parent". The educational surrogate parent takes on the role as the "parent" for children whose parent(s) are not available. The state education agency, most

likely your school or school district, will appoint a surrogate parent, although the court also has the power to appoint surrogate parents as well. A person appointed as a surrogate parent can not be an employee of the state education agency nor any agency involved in the care of a child or youth, including the child welfare agency. In addition, the individual must have no interests that conflict with the interest of the child, and must have knowledge and skills that ensure adequate representation of the child. The state education agency is responsible for providing training for surrogate parents so that they can effectively discharge their responsibilities to a child.

Discipline and Special Education

Students receiving special education and/or 504 services are entitled to additional protections around discipline. If a behavior that triggers a long term suspension or an expulsion is related to the student's disability, the student cannot be disciplined. In these situations, the school must convene a Manifestation Determination Meeting within 10 school days of the date of removal. The IEP team and school administration make up this meeting. They must answer the following question: Did the student's disability have something to do with the behavior in question? Furthermore, if a student receives a pattern of short term suspensions that add up to 10 days, a Manifestation Determination Meeting must be held to address whether or not the IEP/504 Plan is sufficient, whether additional services are needed, or if the school placement needs to change.



Dispute Resolution

Ensuring that the rights of children and youth with special educational needs are met can be very challenging; and, at times you may find yourself disagreeing with the school or school district. Often the disagreement may be about eligibility, evaluations, services, and/or placement. If you ever find yourself in a disagreement, first try to resolve the problem with the IEP team or school. However, if that does not work there are several methods of resolving the issue: formal complaint procedures; mediation; and due process hearing.

Complaint procedures: Every state education agency must have a compliant process that can be initiated by anyone. Complaints must be: 1) Addressed to the State Education Department; 2) State facts of the violation; 3) Name, address of

the person making the complaint; and 4) name, address of local school district. It is important that you keep a copy of the complaint and document when it was sent. The state agency will acknowledge receipt and provide written notice whether an investigation of the allegations is warranted.

Mediation: Under IDEA, states are required to provide free mediation services to parents for the purpose of resolving conflicts about students' special education programs. In this process, a neutral third party is brought in to sit down with both parties and try to come to an acceptable agreement. This process is voluntary and any agreement that is made must be carried out by the parties.

Due process hearing: This is a formal administrative proceeding, much like a trial. At the hearing parent/surrogate

parent and the school district are able to present evidence and witnesses. A hearing officer makes a written decision based on the facts and the law. Parents/surrogate parents may be represented by either a lawyer or someone knowledgeable about special education requirements. Federal law also requires that the school district generally must pay reasonable attorney fees incurred, if a parent/surrogate parent prevails in the trial.

For additional information about DC Public School's dispute resolution process please contact:

Student Hearing Office
Van Ness Elementary School
1150 5th Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 442-5432

District of Columbia's High School Graduation Requirements

Every DCPS student must complete **23.5** Carnegie Units successfully in order to graduate, regardless of the program in which s/he is enrolled. One Carnegie Unit equals two semesters of study in a particular subject. Students must also complete **100** hours of community service as a graduation requirement. Currently students have two options for completing the graduation community service requirement. They may complete it through community service or service learning.

Community Service: Community Service is the process of providing a direct service to the community in addressing a specific need. It is not connected to classroom curriculum and is not completed during academic learning time.

Service Learning: Service-learning is a teaching strategy that links student community service to classroom instruction. It is a method by which youth learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet real community needs. The service projects are designed and coordinated with youth participation that helps to development a sense of civic responsibility and caring for others.

Students may begin their service at any age; however, there are designated Community Service Liaisons at the senior high school level only. Documented and verifiable hours can be placed in the student's cumulative record along with grade reports each year. For additional information, please visit the following website:

<http://www.k12.dc.us/Dcps/curriculum/comserve1.html>

Course	Carnegie Units
Art	0.5
Career/Vocational Education	1.0
D.C. Government & History	0.5
English	4.0
Foreign Language	2.0
Health and Physical Education	1.5*
Mathematics (including 1 year of Algebra/its equivalent)	3.0
Music	0.5
Science (including 1 year of laboratory science)	3.0
U.S. Government	0.5
U.S. History	1.0
World Geography	0.5
World History	1.0
Electives	4.5
100 Hours of Community Service	0.0
Total Carnegie Units	23.5**

Prince George's County High School Graduation Requirements

To be awarded a diploma from Maryland's public school system, a student must be enrolled and earn a minimum of **21** credits that include the following listed below. In addition, every student is required to do **36 hours** of independent service through school activities or volunteering in a non-profit agency or a for-profit hospital, nursing home, or licensed day care center.

Service-learning is a teaching method that combines meaningful service to the community with curriculum-based learning. Students improve their academic skills by applying what they learn in school to the real world; they then reflect on their experience to reinforce the link between their service and their learning. The combination of service-learning infused into the curriculum and the independent service is roughly equivalent to 75 hours. Prince George's county offers a service-learning class for credit, a science mentoring class in eight high schools, and an independent study course in service-learning. For additional information, please visit the following website:

http://www1.pgcps.org/studentservices/ssl.aspx?ekmense1=c580fa7b_1940_0_btnlink.

Course	Specific Requirements	Credits	High School Assessment	NCLB Testing
English		4	Students must take the Maryland High School Assessments for English, algebra/data analysis, biology and government.	Students must take the Maryland School Assessment for geometry.
Mathematics	1 Algebra; 1Geometry; 1 Additional Mathematics	3		
Science	1 Biology; 2 additional credits that must include laboratory experience in any or all of the following areas: earth, life, or physical science	3		
Social Studies	1 US History; 1 Local, Sate, National Government; 1 World History	3		
Course	Other Requirements	Credits		
Fine Arts		1		
Physical Education		0.5		
Health		0.5		
Technology Education		1		
Completer and Electives	2 credits of the same foreign language and 3 electives; 2 credits of advanced technology education and 3 credits in electives; or complete a state-approved career and technology program and any remaining credits in electives	5		
Total Credit Required		21		

Educational Resources

District of Columbia Public Schools:

<http://www.k12.dc.us/>

* General Information: 202-727-1000

* Special Education: 202-442-4800

* Student Support Services: 202-442-5099

Child and Family Services Agency Education Unit

* Tyrone Bradshaw: 202-727-7037

* Palua Langford: 202-727-4652

National Center for Learning Disabilities:

<http://www.ncld.org/content/iew/902/456086/>

National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education (NAPCSE):

<http://napcse.org/specialeducationlaw/dea2004.php>

LDOnline:

<http://www.ldonline.org/>

Internet Special Education Resources:

<http://www.iser.com/>

U. S. Department of Education– Parents

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml>

Parents United for the DC Public Schools:

<http://www.parentsunited4dc.org/>

Wrightslaw

<http://www.wrightslaw.com>

Center for Law and Education

<http://www.cleweb.org/>

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates

<http://www.copaa.net/>

Learning Disability Association of America

<http://www.ldanatl.org/>

Schwab Foundation for Learning

<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=257>

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org/publications